

## Feeding Your Baby<sup>1</sup>

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Feeding your baby is one of the first things you do as a parent. It's also one of the ways that you develop a relationship with this new family member. When feeding goes well, everyone in the family is happier.

The information in this fact sheet can help you develop a close feeding relationship with your baby. The skills you learn will also help you and your child avoid food “fights” during the toddler and preschool years.



### Getting Close to Baby

Your relationship with your baby begins as soon as he or she is born. You communicate with your little one when you hold him or her as you nurse or bottle feed. Parents and caregivers let babies know that they love them by learning what their different cries mean and by responding to their needs. You can never “spoil” infants by holding them and answering their cries with your attention.



The way you handle feeding is an important part of communicating your love to your new baby. Feeding infants “on demand” helps them feel safe and loved.

### Sharing Responsibility

Did you ever think about sharing the responsibility for feeding your baby between the two of you? It may sound strange, but you **both** have a role to play in feeding! Let's see what your role and your baby's role are, and how you can stay focused on only your part.

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## Parent's Role

What is **your** role in the feeding relationship? Simply put, you are responsible for offering healthy foods that are appropriate for your child's age, in a friendly and loving way.



Notice that the word we use is **offering**, not “getting him or her to eat.”

Simply offer nutritious and easy-to-eat food, and let your baby take it from there. For infants under four to six months of age, the only food they need is breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula, so your job is pretty easy! When your baby seems hungry, offer breast or bottle and see what happens. Hungry babies are eager to latch on to the breast or suck on the bottle.

## Baby's Role

What is your baby's role in the feeding relationship? Give your baby the chance to decide how much he or she will eat, and even if he or she will eat at all. After all, who knows best when baby is hungry? Baby does, of course.

And babies also know when they have had enough and want to stop eating. If we pay attention, we can respond to their cue and end feeding time. Even if there is formula left in the bottle, stop feeding when baby is done.

It's so simple when we let baby decide. When your baby cries from hunger is the perfect time to feed him or her. When baby turns his or her head away and seems uninterested, that's the perfect time to stop. There's no need to worry – your baby will let you know when it's time to eat again.

Feeding your baby this way may sometimes be inconvenient, but it will not last forever. Feeding on demand is just for the first year. When your infant becomes a toddler you will start to plan meal and snack times. But for the first year let baby's hunger be your guide.

## Baby's Best Start

Baby's first food is breast milk or iron-fortified infant formula.



Either one will provide adequate nutrition for your baby. Breast milk is the perfect food for babies because it's made just for them!

Some advantages of breastfeeding are:

- ☺ Has proper nutrient composition.
- ☺ Is easy to digest.
- ☺ Contains immune factors.
- ☺ Is inexpensive.
- ☺ Is convenient.
- ☺ May help mom lose weight.
- ☺ Supports close mother-baby bond.

Infant formula is a good choice for some parents. Family members can feed baby (although expressed breast milk also can be put into a bottle). Some mothers may feel less “tied down” if they bottle-feed. If a mother’s diet is not adequate, or if she uses alcohol or drugs, infant formula is recommended.

Be sure to use only formula that is especially designed for infants, NOT evaporated milk or soymilk. Powdered formulas cost less than those that are ready-to-eat. Follow label directions on the package very carefully.

To help develop the closeness that is so natural when breastfeeding, do the following:



- ☺ Hold your baby securely but not too tightly.
- ☺ Look at him or her and smile.
- ☺ Speak softly to your baby.
- ☺ Stop feeding when baby turns his or her head away, cries or squirms.
- ☺ Burp baby gently.
- ☺ Offer the bottle again after soothing or burping your baby. Let baby decide whether or not to eat more.

- ☹ **DON'T** leave baby with a bottle propped in his or her mouth. Babies need to be held as they feed to make them feel secure.
- ☹ Never put anything but infant formula, breast milk, or water in a bottle.

Whether you nurse your baby or use infant formula, you can have a close and happy relationship by following the suggestions above.

Keep in mind that difficult times don't last forever. But neither do the wonderful times. So most of all enjoy every minute with your new baby - they do grow up so fast!

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For more information about infant feeding, contact one of the following reliable sources in your county:

- Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences Educator (look in the blue pages of your telephone book.) Florida Extension offices are listed at: <http://www.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/cesmap.htm>
- WIC nutritionist at the Health Department (also in the blue pages of your telephone book).
- For referral to a registered dietitian (RD) in your area you can call the Florida Dietetic Association at 850/386-8850 or check the yellow pages of your phone book.

### **Recommended Reading**

Satter, E. *Child of Mine: Feeding with Love and Good Sense*, Third Edition. Palo Alto: Bull Publishing Company, (2000). ISBN: 0-92352-151-8

Satter, E. *How to Get Your Kid to Eat...But Not Too Much*. Boulder: Bull Publishing Company, (1987) ISBN: 0-915950-83-9

### **Recommended Web Sites**

Food and Nutrition Information Center, National Agricultural Library, USDA  
has child nutrition and health Web sites listed at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/000008.html>